

Tongue River (221 River Miles)



Figure 28. Tongue River Focus Area

The headwaters of the Tongue River rise in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming. From these sources the river flows northeast to its confluence with the Yellowstone River at Miles City. A major spawning tributary for native fishes found in the Yellowstone system, the Tongue River provides spawning and nursery habitat for sauger, shovelnose sturgeon, channel catfish, and many cyprinid minnow species. The 3,500-acre Tongue River Dam controls the river's flow in Montana. Above the reservoir, the river meanders through a broad open valley. Here its main features are turbid water, slow velocity gravel and mud bottoms, and warm water temperatures. Downstream from the dam, the river flows for 10 miles through a narrow, restrictive canyon with increasing gradient and accompanying cooler water temperatures and gravel bottoms. The Tongue River again becomes a slow, meandering valley stream for its last 179 miles.

Associated Habitats

Habitat Type	Habitat Tier	Acres	Miles
Lowland Lakes	III	665	
Lowland Reservoirs	III	2,176	
Mountain Lakes	III	54	
Prairie Rivers	II		221
Prairie Streams	I		4,843

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 49 aquatic species that are found within the Tongue River Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 32.

Fish: Paddlefish, Sturgeon Chub, Blue Sucker, Burbot, and Sauger

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Dewatering as a result of water diversion	Work with public and private land owners to improve efficiency of water use in order to maximize water return
	Protect instream flow reservations
Water chemistry problems due to irrigation return water and the discharge of wastewater from coal bed methane operations, and other sources	Support cooperative efforts to minimize impacts of return water due to sedimentation, increased salinity and temperature alteration
	Careful study waters entering the Tongue River as a result of coal bed methane development in both Montana and Wyoming
Entrainment of juvenile and adult fishes by irrigation diversions or other water intakes	Screening or modification of irrigation diversions or other water intakes in a manner that prevents entrainment of fishes
Riparian vegetation effected by range and forest management practices and streamside residential development (such activities destabilize streambanks, increase sediment inputs, reduced shading, and remove woody debris)	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices in riparian areas
Modification and degradation of stream channels caused by various construction or land management practices	Restoration of stream channels or streambanks to a condition that simulates their natural form and function
	Modification of riparian management practices such that riparian vegetation is allowed to recover
	Develop statewide riparian best management principles

Alterations of the quantity or timing of stream flows, causing dewatering or unnatural flow fluctuations that diminish the quantity or quality of essential habitats	Implementation of various water conservation or flow management practices that restore essential habitats, simulate the natural hydrograph and also protect instream flows
Culverts, dams, irrigation diversions, and other instream barriers that fully or partially impede fish movement and reduce connectivity of habitat	Removal or modification of barriers in a manner that restores fish passage
Loss of species (mountain whitefish and mountain sucker) below Tongue River Dam due to de-watering and drought	Support cooperative efforts to increase water flow and reduce barriers to migration specifically affecting these species